

XVII.—*A Note on Loxia pytyopsittacus Bork.*

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IN the lately published 'List of British Birds,' compiled by a committee of the B.O.U., I was very surprised to find that the Parrot Crossbill, *Loxia pytyopsittacus* Bork., was not included either as a good species or subspecies, and such a finding cannot be passed over without comment. It will perhaps be interesting to review how some previous authors regarded the question. Pennant was the first to notice this bird in Britain, and looked upon it as a large variety; he "received a male and female out of Shropshire," and noted accurately the characteristic features as compared with the Common Crossbill. Selby's Ross-shire specimen, used for the figure in his work and in the later editions of 'Bewick,' might now-a-days perhaps be open to doubt, but Mr. Eagle Clarke informs me that this actual specimen is still in existence in the Royal Scottish Museum, and is a genuine example of *L. pytyopsittacus*. Fleming included it as a straggler, and Macgillivray, although he admitted it to his list, seemed doubtful as to its validity but allowed he had only seen one specimen. Newton, in the fourth edition of Yarrell, accepted it without hesitation, remarking that it had for many years received specific recognition from the most approved authorities. Sharpe, on the other hand, and Saunders following him, did not "consider it even worthy of subspecific rank." Mr. Dresser, who examined many specimens of both forms, included it in his 'Birds of Europe,' and Dr. Hartert finds it a place in his 'Palearctic Birds.' That specimens rightly referred to this bird have been on a number of occasions obtained in Great Britain cannot be doubted on referring to Yarrell, ed. iv. vol. ii. pp. 208-9, and several of these are still in existence, although they have not come under Dr. Hartert's notice (*Vögel paläarkt. Fauna*, p. 123).

Now to come to facts as regards this bird in contradistinction to the Common Crossbill. First we have the

testimony of Wheelwright, an excellent field-naturalist who had excellent opportunities of observing both birds. He says it breeds in parts of Sweden (though he never met with it in Lappland), and that its appearance *scarcely ever coincides with that of L. curvirostra*; also that it feeds more on the seeds of the Scotch fir (and in this he is corroborated by Taczanowski), whereas *L. curvirostra* prefers the spruce; moreover the eggs and nest are generally somewhat larger.

Again, we have the evidence of the late Professor Collett (Mindre Medd. vedr. Nöriges Fugelf. 1877-80, p. 73), who was not one to "hair-split" species. Here is a translation of what he says:—"Intermediates between this (*pytyopsittacus*) and *L. curvirostra*, or individuals whose diagnosis could be uncertain, I have up till now never seen in Norway. In 1881 this species occurred in larger numbers than *L. curvirostra*; in the Christiania district it occurs nearly every year, but in certain years when the Scotch fir has had a good cone-crop it is quite numerous. The autumn of 1881 was such a year in many parts, and in that year flocks visited many such districts, where they spent the winter and some remained to breed; in the autumn of 1882 some were seen again in October, but none afterwards." It is well known of course that Crossbills occur in numbers in some district in a certain year and remain to breed, deserting again that district for perhaps a number of years, and we have the above evidence from Scandinavia that the Parrot Crossbill behaves in a similar way. If, then, the Parrot Crossbill is only a large variety and not a true species, it would be certainly most remarkable that the two should not occur equally numerously together and interbreed, and that we should have no evidence from either Wheelwright or Collett that such takes place, but rather to the exact opposite.

That the Parrot Crossbill is a distinctly larger bird than the Common Crossbill I suppose no one will doubt. I have had the opportunity of examining only four recently, but neither of these nor any others that I have ever seen could be

confounded with the Common Crossbill. The Scottish Crossbill (*L. c. scotica*), as will be seen from the measurements appended, is intermediate between the other two, but even so I have not seen out of fifteen or more specimens any which might be confounded with *L. pytyopsittacus*.

Though measurements do just indicate the differences in the size of the bill in these three birds, one can tell perhaps more easily by the comparative appearances of the strong, stout, thick, blunt-pointed bills of *scotica* and *pytyopsittacus*, than by actual measurement.

Loxia curvirostra curvirostra.

	Wing.	Tail.	Tarsus.	Culmen, from feather edge.	Height of upper mandible at base.	Width of lower mandible at base.
♂	93-101	58-62	17-18	17.5-20	7-7.75	10.5-11
♀	92-96	56-61	17-18	17.5-19.5	7-7.75	9.5-10.75

Loxia curvirostra scotica.

♂	98.5-104	61-64	17-18	18.5-20	8.25-9	11.5-13
♀	95-98.5	58.5-63.5	17-18	17.75-19.5	7-8	11-12

Loxia pytyopsittacus.

♂ (4 only) .	103-108	63.5-67	17-18	19.25-22	9.5-10	13.5-14
♀ (Collett) .	102-104	62-63	?	?	?	?

These measurements, which I have taken myself on a number of specimens, agree more or less with those of Prof. Collett, Mr. Dresser, and Dr. Hartert where corresponding measurements are given.

It would appear to be unreasonable to accept *L. scotica* as a good form and yet exclude *L. pytyopsittacus*. It may be urged that *L. scotica* has a definite and confined distribution, which is true *so far as we know at present*, though personally I failed to see any distinguishing character between *L. scotica* and the Cypriote bird, called *L. guillemardi*, on comparing a number of specimens of each.